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GOD'S EDUCATION OF MEN: PROVERBS 3:11,12.

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מִזְרָר וַחֲדָה בֶּן־אֱלֹהִים אָס
וְאֱלֹהִים קָרְבָּן בְּתוּכָהוּ:
כִּי אֵת אָשָׁר־יְהֹוָה בְּרוּתָה יוּכָה
וְכָאָב אָתָּה־בֶּן רְנֵצָה:

My son, neglect (slight) not the education of Yahweh,
Nor loathe his discipline.

For whom Yahweh loves he disciplines (trains up)
Even as a father his favorite son.¹

Septuagint: Τίέ, μὴ δλιγάρει παιδεῖας Κυρίου,
μηδὲ ἐκλύνου ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχόμενος·
δν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ Κύριος ἀλέγχει,
μαστιγοῖ δὲ πάντα νιὸν δν παραδέχεται.

Hebrews 12:5, 6: Τίέ μου, μὴ δλιγάρει παιδεῖας Κυρίου,
μηδὲ ἐκλύνου ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχόμενος·
δν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ Κύριος παιδεύει,
μαστιγοῖ δὲ πάντα νιὸν δν παραδέχεται.

R. V. (Am.): My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord,
Nor faint when thou art reproved of him;
For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth,
And scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

IN both verbs and nouns in vs. 11 there is climactic parallelism. The first verb means merely "to be indifferent to," "to regard as of little importance," "to neglect;" the second originated in the sound made by vomiting, and is exactly translated by the Scotch word "scunner." The verb **בִּזְבַּח** is "education," **παιδεία**. The piel of the verb is regularly employed to denote the training of youth (Deut. 8:5; Prov. 18:9), and in the book of Proverbs the noun gener-

¹ Translation of the R. V. (Am.): "My son, despise not the chastening of Jehovah; neither be weary of his reproof: for whom Jehovah loveth he reproveth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth." PROFESSOR TOV, in the *International Critical Commentary on Proverbs*, translates: "Reject not, my son, the instruction of Yahweh, and spurn not his reproof, for whom he loves he reproves, and he afflicts him in whom he delights."

ally refers to the education given in the school of wisdom. Like its Greek equivalent, the word may mean "chastening;" but it is corrective, not retributive, as for example in Isa. 53:5, "The chastisement of (*i. e.*, leading to) our peace." The second noun may mean "punishment," either retributive or educative; or it may mean "discipline"—education on its sterner and more repressive side. Neither word in this passage means "punishment;" both refer to education in general, and as applied to the individual they are the same as the Torah and Judgments of which the prophets spoke to the nation. It may, indeed, be that the growing technical limitations of the old prophetic words led the later writers to adopt other and less abstract terms when addressing the individual. Vs. 12 gives an argument for the observance of the injunction. It is a mark of God's favor to be thus educated.

This passage appears to be more ancient than the corresponding one in Job 5:17, although the section of the book in which it occurs is the oldest part of Proverbs (with the probable exception of the poem in praise of a diligent woman). The verses have every appearance of antiquity. They have here no inseparable context, and seem to have formed a current proverbial saying, which, being in harmony with his teaching, the writer inserts; a popular saying would add weight to his discourse, as a verse of Scripture or a quotation from a church authority is employed to add weight to a sermon.

The picture of God and his providence given in this passage is a very pleasing one, but by a strange perversion it has been sadly twisted in exegesis. As Job 13:15, one of the gloomiest verses in the Old Testament, was changed in the process of the ages into one of the most hopeful, so this, one of the brightest, has been converted into one of the saddest. It has been applied exclusively to the suffering in the world, and many sad, hopeless, oftentimes irritating, sermons have been preached from it. There is absolutely no reason for this limitation. It is the whole education of a youth to which God's dealings with his people are likened. It is not even the training of a school, where there are no ties except those of master over student; it is the home, where the boy is educated in many things besides mere "book-learning," and where education is saturated with affection. A wise, loving father—and such the writer necessarily had in his mind—does

not make whipping the chief agent in training his son for his life's work.

It is true that human favoritism in the family ("his favorite son," vs. 12), a thing we are generally inclined to regard as a sign of weakness in a parent, is said to be paralleled by divine favoritism; but this idea of a special choice by God runs through the whole Bible, and is a part of the warp and woof of Semitic religion. The figure of a favorite son, however, is a suitable one for the time of the author. The law of primogeniture does not hold so strictly in the East as in the West, while religion developing into custom entailed certain family duties and privileges upon one member. It therefore became the father's duty to select as his particular heir that one of his sons whom he regarded as best fitted to succeed him. This was the practice of the kings of Egypt, Assyria, and Israel,² and shows what must have been the practice among, at least, the upper classes. It is therefore a noble teaching which this passage conveys. God labors with his people as a father does with the son who is to uphold the honor of the family. We have here a picture of the nearness of God well suited to either the primitive conceptions, when God walked with man well pleased, or to modern theology, where the kindly attitude of God to man is more emphasized. It is certainly not the product of the later, hard post-exilic theology.

But while the underlying conception may be old, the present form of the proverb which emphasizes more the repressive side of education cannot be pre-prophetic. A bedouin father does not, as a rule, deal severely with his sons, lest they take a dislike to him and after his death neglect the post-mortem sacrifices and prayers. No doubt the same was the practice among the early Hebrews and would persist long after the entrance into Canaan, where because of the new environment it would be accompanied with more disastrous results.³ But new conditions made education very different from the simple training of the nomad, and the new religion of the prophets changed the old ways and faiths; so that though none the less loving, education became much more severe and stern. It is from this later time that the present form of the passage comes.

² Cf. David's choice of Solomon, and Sennacherib's choice of Esarhaddon.

³ It is very strange that in so many families in the early period the sons were badly spoiled. This was the case in the families of Eli, Samuel, and David.

The efficacy of corporal punishment has been a dogma among educationists. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" has its parallel in a very ancient Egyptian proverb: "The ears of a boy are on his back." In the ruins of Pompeii are some representations of youths being castigated in the interests of education. We expect, therefore, to find the sterner side of God's educative plan emphasized; he too will use the birch upon his scholars when they will not learn. But it is a fatal mistake to regard this as the only meaning of the passage, or even the only reference of the second noun. Boys sometimes come to "loathe" (vs. 11) their school or home, even though there be no corporal punishment; the continual round of discipline, the steady grind of study, weary a youth until he feels like running away. So in the school of God, men who have never received what is worthy of the name of chastisement often grow weary, and sometimes wish they could abandon the training and work.

There was nothing that the Hebrew prophet and poet delighted more to do than to look back over the providence of Jehovah in the training of his nation, and it was the love, the patience, the help of God, more than the punishments, from which he drew lessons for present instruction, although the latter were not neglected. The writer in penning or quoting this passage transfers to the individual experience the old national ideas. The education is the Torah, everything whereby God made himself known to the people; and the discipline is the *Mishpatim* and the *Huqqim* which he gave for their guidance, and to keep them in the right path. The original application of this passage in Proverbs is not for a moment in doubt.

When we turn to the Greek version of the Septuagint, we find ourselves in a completely changed atmosphere. The cheerfulness of the home has disappeared; we are enveloped in the heavy—one might almost say in this case, foggy—atmosphere of abstract philosophy, and confronted with the old, old problem of suffering and the reason for its being.

The Alexandrian translators read בְּנֵי as a verb—a rendering linguistically possible, but historically impossible, as the teaching implied by this reading is too late for Proverbs. Primitive peoples universally believe in the divine nemesis; affliction is a direct punishment for certain sins. This is the teaching of the friends of Job,

and in support of their accusations they quote this passage, putting a wrong interpretation upon it. This doctrine was the faith of the masses in the time of Christ (John 9:2), and is still held in a modified form by many Christians.⁴

But the old explanations were now failing to satisfy the thoughtful among both Greeks and Hebrews, and the question was being earnestly discussed. The book of Job is the Hebrew contribution to the solution of the problem. The Greek philosopher Sophocles taught very clearly that suffering was not punishment, but was for the purpose of training (*πάθημα μάθημα*); suffering is education, was his explanation. And it is because they were influenced by this new doctrine that the translators of the Septuagint adopted the reading they did. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (12:5, 6) follows the Greek, but seeks to apply his Sophoclean philosophy by the aid of the original reference.

We can thus trace four stages in the history of this saying: There is first the simple application of Proverbs—by his dealings with his people God is training them just as a father educates his heir. In all the other stages the reference is limited to suffering. In Job, Eliphaz employs it to enforce his theory that suffering is punishment. The Greek translation uses it in support of the new dogma that suffering is education. Finally, in Hebrews the purely theoretic teaching of the Septuagint is combined with the practical teaching of the original, with, however, more emphasis upon the abstract than upon the practical.

⁴ Of the still more ancient explanation of affliction by the divine envy (*φθόνος*), which is seen in the Adapa myth, and which had a revival among the Greeks after the fall of the Persian power, there are few traces in the Old Testament.